



Removal of a Heritage Street Tree 537 Hazel Avenue

City Council Meeting - Tuesday, November 13, 2018

Joanne Magrini, Community Services Director

Background

- This is an appeal of a City staff decision to remove a sycamore tree that is causing a potential safety hazard near 537 Hazel Avenue.
- Despite periodic pruning by PG&E, the tree continues to overgrow into nearby power lines, and as a result of the pruning, its canopy is blocking the illumination of the nearby street light, creating a potential safety hazard for pedestrians and residents.
- Staff received three letters from residents appealing the decision.



History

- The London Plane (Sycamore) Tree was planted over 19 years ago as a street tree in the planting strip between the street and the sidewalk next to a PG&E power pole and street light
- The distance between the tree and the pole is approximately 2 ½ to 3 feet
- Because the tree sits directly under power lines, PG&E is required to prune within 2 feet below the lines before City staff can prune further



History

- As a result of multiple outings to “top” the tree, the spread of the tree has become vast
- This outward growth has directly impacted the diminished illumination of the street light at night, thus posing a potential safety hazard



Request for Action

- A request was made in December 2017 from the resident of 533 Hazel Avenue to remove the tree
 - Resident's mother had slipped and fallen, breaking her wrist two years prior due to the large amount of leaves and the lack of light at night
 - The resident then indicated that her mother had more recently tripped again
- Staff determined that the tree would need to be removed and replaced with a smaller tree
 - The frequent topping of the tree had caused it to spread, thus obscuring illumination from the street light and making it difficult to see at night for residents using the sidewalk
- It is important to note our management of urban reforestation improves our environment and the long term sustainability of the City's urban forest.

Current Challenges

- The trunk of the tree has grown to its maximum at the base
- Further growth will cause the sidewalk, curb, and street to be compromised, creating a potential tripping hazard
- A portion of the sidewalk next to the sycamore was replaced in April 2017



Current Challenges

- The tree requires frequent pruning to maintain the intended illumination from the street light
- The rotation for the next regular pruning on Hazel Avenue will occur in FY2020-21
- Given its growth pattern, staff estimates the tree would need pruning every year instead of every four years

Current Challenges

- Even if the current tree were maintained for the next few years, it would eventually need to be removed
 - Unsustainable maintenance requirements
 - Creates a tripping hazard on the sidewalk



Consultation

- Staff consulted with an independent arborist
- The arborist examined the tree and recommends that it be removed
 - Tree is poorly located
 - Cost prohibitive to try and maintain the needed servicing and maintenance due to the annual pruning required
- He recommends that the tree be replaced with a smaller one such as a Western Redbud, as suggested by City staff
 - It will grow to approximately 15 feet in height, with a maximum spread of about 10 feet



Western Redbud

Fiscal Impact

- Removal of the sycamore will be performed by PG&E at no cost
- The approximate fee for the replacement Western Redbud is \$55 which is covered by the Parks Maintenance FY2018-19 Operating Budget
- The planting of the new tree will be performed by City staff within a week of removal

Options

City Council can...

1. Direct staff to obtain additional information and continue the appeal
2. Uphold the Appeal and direct staff to return with a resolution supporting that action

Recommendation

Staff Recommendation

- Adopt a Resolution Upholding Decision to Remove a Sycamore Tree from the City Right-of-Way on the Sidewalk near 537 Hazel Avenue and Direct Staff to Plant a Replacement Tree